

**West Mojave Plan  
Steering Committee Meeting  
May 31, 2000  
Green Tree Inn, Victorville**

**Attendees**

**Steering Committee Members:** Ramon Mendoza, Becky Jones, Randy Scott, Mark Hagan, Ileene Anderson, Brad Mitzelfelt, Lorelei Oviatt, Jeanette Hayhurst, Ray Bransfield, Tim Read, Hector Villalobos, Peter Kiriakos, Mike Connor, Jeri Ferguson

**West Mojave Team Staff:** Bill Haigh, Chuck Bell, Valery Pilmer, Ed LaRue, Larry LaPre

**Other Attendees:** Lisa Northrop (San Bernardino County), John Gustafson (CDFG), David Charlton (Fort Irwin)

**Introduction**

Bill Haigh opened the meeting and presented a proposed agenda as follows:

- Facilitator
- Task Group 2 Process
- Recap May 15 Meeting
- Strategies and Prescriptions

In addition to the above items, it was agreed that Ed LaRue would provide a brief update on the status of the strategies for the Mojave Ground Squirrel, and those who attended the Military EPA meeting on May 25<sup>th</sup> would provide a brief report on that meeting.

**Facilitator**

Bill Haigh provided information regarding the status of the BLM contract with the Mediation Institute to provide facilitation services for the West Mojave Plan. Bill indicated that the military, California Department of Fish and Game and the BLM all contributed funding for the contract. At this point the contract amount has been expended. Due to BLM budget constraints, all discretionary contract funding in the California Desert District has been frozen. In light of this, Bill offers alternatives for the group to consider.

- Identify another source of funding to continue the contract with the Mediation Institute.
- Consider other alternatives such as group members “self mediating” the meetings or have BLM staff mediate the meetings.

The group identified the need for any facilitator to remain neutral and expressed concern about the need for continuity and moving the process along.

Becky Jones (CDFG) indicated that the department could look into the possibility of additional funding for a facilitator, but only after the beginning of the next state fiscal year (i.e. after July 1, 2000). Mark Hagan (Edward AFB) indicated that additional military funding for facilitation services this federal fiscal year (i.e. prior to October 1, 2000), while being explored, is not expected.

The Steering Committee members agreed that Bill Haigh will act as facilitator during the next few weeks. West Mojave Plan staff will assist Bill by note taking, assisting with flip charts and lap top computer, and presenting information. The issue will be revisited next fiscal year after the agencies explore the possibility of additional funding to continue the contract with the Mediation Institute.

## **Task Group 2 Process**

Bill Haigh outlines a proposal for proceeding with Task Group 2. After discussion, the following process was agreed upon:

- BLM will prepare 1:24,000 scale maps of the OHV route network suggested by BLM staff. Maps are being prepared for each 19 of the subregions into which western Mojave Desert public lands have been categorized (assuming 2 or 3 maps per subregion, a total of 40 to 50 maps) plus a report for each subregion outlining the rationale for the proposal.
- The first 4 of these subregion maps and narratives will be available in about four weeks.
- Once the first set of maps is available, BLM will do a staff presentation to Task Group 2 explaining the proposal and rationale. All Steering Committee members are encouraged to attend this meeting. The first four maps and subarea reports will be available at the meeting.
- During the following three month period, OHV groups and other interested groups and individuals will field review the subregions. The remainder of the subregion maps and reports will be released as they become available. Also, during this period, the BLM will host 3 or 4 open houses in various locations where BLM staff will be available to answer questions.
- During and after the three month review period, comments will be compiled from the public, the West Mojave Team, Task Group 2 and the Steering Committee. These comments will be funneled to two working teams, one considering Barstow BLM routes, and one addressing the Ridgecrest BLM network. These “technical review teams” (TRT) could include 4 non-BLM individuals from Task Group 2 and 2 BLM staff members.

- The TRTs would revise the route network.
- The TRT recommendation would be presented to the BLM California Desert District Advisory Council for concurrence.
- The final recommended route network would be folded into the rest of the recommendations for the West Mojave Plan.
- “Scoping” of the EIS/EIR would then occur, involving additional public meetings.
- A Draft EIS/EIR would be prepared and released for public review.

Other suggestions/agreements coming out of the Task Group 2 discussion included the following:

- Consider making maps available on CD.
- Hold open houses close to the subregion.
- Put together packets of information to include the subregion map, report and a blank data sheet. These packets could be made available to Steering Committee and Task Group members to ensure they get to all interested parties.
- Ed LaRue and Geri Ferguson will work together on a data sheet for people to use as they field review the proposed route network.
- Becky Jones, CDFG will get together with Department hunting and fishing people to identify important areas that may be affected by route designation.

### **Recap of May 15 Meeting**

Bill Haigh asked if any corrections needed to be made to the May 15 meeting notes. He then presented an overview of the 2-tier approach, as discussed to date:

- DWMA’s would be established for areas important to the recovery of the Desert Tortoise and Mojave Ground Squirrel. These areas would have a 1% cap per jurisdiction on new ground disturbance.
- Biological Transition Areas (BTA) would be established adjacent to the DWMA’s where a transition area is judged to be necessary to maintain the biological integrity of the DWMA. For example, a transition area need not be established where the DWMA abuts Wilderness or areas managed as critical habitat by the military. However, a BTA could be established where private/public land abuts the DWMA, and the potential exists for ground disturbing activities to occur. The width and exact location of these BTA’s has yet to be determined.
- Special review criteria/mitigation measures would be developed for ground disturbing activities within these Biological Transition Areas.
- Speciality Areas would be established outside the DWMA’s to provide protection for species other than Desert Tortoise and Mojave Ground Squirrel.
- BTAs and Specialty Areas could be implemented through overlay zoning by the local jurisdictions, and through establishment of ACEC’s by the BLM.
- A desert tortoise Incidental Take Area would be mapped to show areas where

tortoise may occur, and areas where they are highly unlikely to occur. Within those areas where tortoises may occur, tortoise removal surveys would be required prior to ground disturbance.

The issues raised during discussion were as follows:

- Clarification needed regarding the location of BTAs. Concern was expressed that it would not be appropriate to apply a transition area to land currently managed as critical habitat on military bases. Bill Haigh indicated that staff will attempt to draw the lines to define these Biological Transition Areas, and will bring a proposal back to the Steering Committee for review.
- Additional thought needs to be given to the names of the various areas. Some concern was expressed that the terms “Biological Transition Area”, “Incidental Take Area”, and “Specialty Area” might not be the best names for these areas. (Note: The terms used in these notes are for clarity purposes, and should not be considered the final choice of terms.) It was suggested that the term “Incidental Take Area” may be a “red button” term, while other members felt it to be an accurate description. Bill Haigh indicated that staff will propose terms for the various components of the two-tier approach and present those to the Steering Committee for consideration at a future meeting.
- Consider developing voluntary programs for conserving species within the Incidental Take Area. Some concern was expressed that the two-tier approach does little to address the problems associated with urban sprawl, and that there should be some effort to minimize loss of habitat and species within the Incidental Take Area. Others in the group feel strongly that the West Mojave Plan, as an HCP, should utilize DWMA’s and Speciality Areas to mitigate species loss, and do not see the need to focus on proposals that direct or otherwise control land use activities within the Incidental Take Areas. It was noted that the proposed Incidental Take Area is very large, and that the potential for development occurring in much of the area over the life of the Plan is very low. As a compromise, it was suggested that the jurisdictions develop voluntary programs which could serve to enhance or protect viable habitat within the Incidental Take Areas.

## **I. Summary of Mojave Ground Squirrel Conservation Strategy**

Ed LaRue provided the group with a summary of the current status on the conservation strategy for the MGS. The strategy identified 59 of the 134 tortoise management prescriptions as applicable to MGS, assuming minor modifications were incorporated. These prescriptions would be applied within the MGS portion of the DWMA. Assuming these prescriptions are adopted, MGS site surveys presently required as a pre-requisite for project development would no longer be a mandatory condition for project approval. Ed is completing the MGS writeup based on meetings with CDFG and FWS staff. The report should be available shortly, as Chapter 3 of the Evaluation Report.

Staff was asked to include the same acreage charts in Chapter 3 (MGS) as were provided for the tortoise in Chapter 2. Staff was also asked to identify the portion of the DWMA within which MGS prescriptions would apply.

It was also noted that the DWMA boundary on the “blue blob” map needs updating.

### **Tortoise: Conservation Strategy and Prescriptions**

In regards to Generally Applicable Measures, beginning on page 2-23 of the Draft Evaluation Report, the following decisions were made:

**Paragraph 1.** Delete reference to Managed Use Areas and add language regarding Speciality Areas.

**Paragraph 2.** Delete reference to MUA and delete last sentence.

**Pre-Ground Disturbance Tortoise Surveys: (Bill, I couldn’t tell from my notes what we did with this)**

### **Agriculture:**

The Steering Committee agreed that agriculture should be treated the same as other ground disturbing activities are treated. If a fee is required, then agriculture should pay. The following was agreed upon:

If native habitat converts to agriculture	Pay fee
If native habitat converts to development	Pay fee
If agriculture has already paid fee and develops	No fee

The following scenarios were determined to require further work:

If established agriculture converts to development	?
If fallow agriculture converts to development	?

Lorelei Oviatt and Mike Connor agreed to work together to develop recommendations about how to handle situations where a conversion to non-agricultural development is proposed for either fallow fields, or for established fields for which compensation never was required. They will examine and, if appropriate, apply the agriculture strategy developed through the Kern County Valley Floor HCP effort. Valery Pilmer will provide Mike and Lorelei with information on how agriculture was handled in other HCPs.

It was also agreed that agriculture would need additional review if in DWMA’s, BTA’s or Speciality Areas. Definitions of the different circumstances listed above need to be developed.

